

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THE LEADING HAND.

Deacon Baker laid down his religious weekly, raised his "specs" until they rested on the top of his shiny bald head, grasped firmly the arms of his Elder-Brewster arm-chair, crossed his legs and looked meditatively into the fire.

Whenever Deacon Baker raised his "specs," assumed that position, and said he had something to say, we knew it would be worth hearing.

The deacon's household was a primitive one; in it many of the old customs were preserved. There were old-fashioned chairs, settles, fireplaces and occupations. There were clothes for every day and Sunday garments—the latter laid away during the week, folded and perfumed, made one think there might be a religion in dress. There was a Sabbath observance that made one feel that there still remained

"A day of rest and beauty,
A day of peace and love."

There was nothing stilted or forced, and we boys, who had been sent up from the city to get exercise and health on the farm, took in the simple piety that abounded there as we did the sunlight and the healthful air of the hills.

Father had been there before us, and he often said he owed much of his success in life to the wholesome teachings of the good deacon—teachings that came, as come spring-time and autumn, in their course. There was the opening of a furrow here, the dropping of a seed there, and at length a reaping of good resolves and purposes that astonished even ourselves; for we hardly knew whence they came.

My brother Ben was quicker in perception than myself, and he always said that the deacon was of the same sort as other people, and that away back he possessed the same frailties and failings; only he had mastered them—compelled them to yield.

"I have heard people in prayer-meetings," said Ben, "tell about being 'monuments of God's saving grace,' 'brands plucked from the burning,' and all that; I don't put the deacon in that line, but I am certain that at some time, and in some place, he has gone wrong."

I always tried to make out why Ben could think so, and I always ended as I began—in wonder. The evening of which I write, it all came out.

"I have just read a little sarcumstance," continued the deacon, "that puts me back a matter of fifty years. You can read for yourself what I allude to; but what I am going to tell has never been in print.

"Fifty years ago, come April, I was fourteen years old, I remember the day, and more particular the night, as 'twere an hour since. I see my old home as 'twere before me now—the sloping roof, the big flat stone at the door, the maple trees, the orchard, the well-sweep; I see the shadows they cast, for the moon was up; I see myself standing in the road and looking back; I hear the words I said,—they have always sounded in my ears, more or less, coming back from the past as the echo from the hills: 'The world is wide,' I said, 'and I mean to try it; I will go where I can do as I like, where I can be my own master.'

"Poor fool that I was! I left a pleasant home, a dear mother, and a good father—ran away. My only stock in life was a defiant will and a purpose to do as I had a mind. I had rebelled because my father insisted on my obeying him without question. I found other things wide besides the world. I found there was a great distance between the starting out and the getting to; that a poor boy with a bundle, and a good place with kindness and pay in it, were out of sight with each other, as is our country on the one side and China on the other. I found it was one thing to plan what I could do, and another to do it.

"I have often heard people say that I was good because I was born so—that 'twere the natur of things. I am not one of them sort who call themselves 'vile worms of the dust;' I trust I have attained some measure of grace, and I have got it by hard discipline. I would like to tell all my life from fourteen to seventeen, but there is no time to-night, and there is this particular sarcumstance I want to dwell on.

"I can't say I had no principle at seventeen years old; but I can say the good in me was about all covered up. I have often thought of myself then as a rich piece of ground run over with weeds. My plans were how to deceive my employers, how to get the most for the least, and to get square with the world because I had set myself against it. My mother had forgiven me for running away, and had gone to heaven; my father had brought home a new wife, who had no call for me, and there seemed no hand to hold me back. And this is what struck me so forcibly in that piece in the paper, that there is a leading hand of Providence; that it is ever stretched out and above us; that its grip is often loose—that it lets one go and go, as 'twere,—but at last it reaches out and snatches one back—as I would snatch you from the edge of the falls—and flings him upon a height from which he can never more descend.

"I was seventeen years old when the Hand reached me. I had about touched bottom; I had contemplated, but, thank God, not committed crime. I had planned with two companions to rob my employer. We had engaged passage on an East Indiaman to sail at break of day; when the robbery would be discovered we would be on the high seas. In them days there was no telegraph to get ahead of us, and we had no fear of being caught. I was to remain in the store, secreted among some old boxes; at a certain hour I was to let in my companions, and together we would do the desperate deed. Well do I remember that night; it was dark, and outside it was still; inside there was noise enough. I could hear my heart beat like taps on the door; the blood forced into my head with a whizzing sound; there were strange, unnatural whispers in my ears, and I could have sworn I heard the clanking of chains and the opening and closing of prison doors. My own breath became painfully audible, and was fanned back into my face like a hot flame. I could endure darkness no longer; I crept out from

the boxes; I groped about until I found a candle; I lit it, and seeing a piece of written paper, I took it up and read it. It seemed to me like the handwriting on the wall. Some time I will show it to you; I have it laid away. This is what was written:—

"It may be thou art on the verge of ruin; if so, turn back; from a sinful purpose it is never too late to retreat. The path of evil thou hast well trodden; forsake it: disused, the grass will grow upon it; thou wilt perceive it no more."

"Some would say it was chance laid that paper in my way; I tell you, boys, it was the hand of Providence; it grasped me and flung me clean out of my wicked ways. I kept guard in that store all night; my comrades, seeing the light, thought I was caught and would tell on 'em, and so they shipped in the East Indiaman, and in the morning were far away. With all my bad surroundings gone, I began as 'twere a new life.

"I have heard it said, 'The sins of youth become the smarts of old age.' That may all be, but the sting is taken out of my smart; I have bound up my bad days like a book fastened with clasps, and I seldom open it; for I hold, what God has forgiven, man may forget. But that little piece in the paper brought it all back to my mind clear as noonday."

"Deacon Baker," said brother Ben, grasping the old man's hand, "I knew it—I knew you had fought with temptation and beat it."

"Did you ever," said I, "hear from your companions?" "Yes; there was a missionary aboard the ship; through him the Lord caught hold on them. One stayed out to India, and I've heard he did a great deal of good there; the other one became master of a full-rigged ship, and went down on her, standing by his duty like a man, refusing to get into the last boat because he was one too many. O boys, I often think of them old days at home before I ran away. I can never make out what possessed me to do as I did, and turn my back on them that loved me. I tell you it's an awful thing to go out into the world from the home that has held you so long and so tenderly, without a leave-taking and a God bless you."

"Boys," said the deacon, when he bade us good-night, "I hope you will never have to be pulled back with the force I was, and never forget there is above you a leading Hand."—Observer.

THE SILENT SEARCHERS.

When the darkness of night has fallen,
And the birds are fast asleep,
An army of silent searchers
From the dusky shadows creep;
And over the quiet meadows
Or amid the waving trees,
They wander about with their tiny lamps
That flash in the evening breeze.

And this army of silent searchers,
Each with his flickering light,
Wanders about till the morning
Has driven away the night.
What treasures they may be seeking
No man upon earth can know;
Perhaps 'tis the home of the fairies
Who lived in the long ago.

For an ancient legend tells us
That once, when the fairy king
Had summoned his merry minstrels
At the royal feast to sing,
The moon, high over the tree tops,
With the stars refused to shine,
And an army with tiny torches
Was called from the oak and pine.

And when, by the imps of darkness,
The fairies were chased away,
The army began its searching
At the close of a dreary day;
Through all the years that have followed
The seekers have searched the night,
Piercing the gloom of the hours
With the flash of the magic light.

Would you see the magical army?
Then come to the porch with me!
Yonder among the hedges
And near to the maple tree,
Over the fields of clover
And down in the river-damp,
The fire-flies search till the morning,
Each with his flickering lamp.

—Henry Ripley Dorr.

THE FOUNTAIN OF FIRE.

The volcano of Kilauea is always in action. Its lake of lava and brimstone rolls and surges from age to age.

As the great volcano is within the limits of my parish, and as my missionary trail flanks it on three sides, I may have observed it a hundred times, but never twice in the same state.

On one occasion, when there with a party of friends, we found the door of entrance to the floor of the crater closed against us. A flood of burning fusion, covering some fifty acres, had burst out at the lower end of the path, shutting out all visitors, so that we spent the day and night upon the upper rim of the abyss.

On another occasion I found the great South Lake filled to the brim, and pouring out in two deep and broad canals at nearly opposite points of the lake. The lava followed these crescent fissures of fifty or more feet deep and wide, until they came within half a mile of meeting under the northern wall of the crater, thus nearly enclosing an area of about two miles in length and a mile and a half in breadth. A pyrometer, sent out by Professor J. D. Dana, was put

into my hands to measure the heat of melted lava. I had taken it with me twice to the crater unsuccessfully, the fusion being too deep in the lake to be reached. I had also sent it up by others, with instructions, hoping to get it inserted; but failing, I went up with my friend Dr. Lafon. We descended the crater and travelled south about two miles, when a vast mound like a truncated cone rose before us. Not recognizing this elevation, I said to my companion, "This is a new feature in the crater; I have not seen it before. It is about where the lake used to be; but let us pass over it, and we shall probably find the lake on the other side." With the instrument in hand we began to ascend the elevation on an angle of about twenty degrees. When half-way up, there came over a splash of burning fusion, which fell near our feet. Our hair was electrified, and we retreated in haste.

Going to a little distance, we mounted an extinct cone which overlooked the eminence we had left, when lo! to our amazement, it was the Great South Lake of Fire, no longer, as often, one to two hundred feet below us, but risen to a level of about twenty-five feet above the surrounding plain, and contained by a circular dam of cooled lava some three miles in circumference. The scene was awful. Over all that high and extended surface the fiery billows were surging and dashing with infernal seething and mutterings and hissings. The whole surface was in ebullition; and now and then large blisters, many feet in length, viscous films of the consistency of glutinous matter, would rise in gigantic bubbles, created by the lifting gases, and then burst and disappear.

We were struck with amazement; and the question was shall we again venture near that awful surface? We could frequently see the lava flood spilling over the rim like a boiling cauldron; and what if the encircling dam should burst, and pour its deluge of fiery ruin over all the surrounding area! But unwilling to fail in our experiment, we came down from the cone, and carefully, and with eyes agaze, began to ascend the wall. Again and again we were driven back by the splashes of red-hot lava. We persevered, and, watching and dodging the spittings, I was at last able to reach so near the top of the dam as to thrust the pyrometer through the thin part of the upper rim, when out burst a gory stream of lava, and we ran down to await the time of the withdrawal of the instrument. The shaft of the pyrometer was about four feet long, with a socket, into which I had firmly fastened a ten-foot pole. When at last we grasped the pole and pulled, the strength of four strong arms could not dislodge the pyrometer. We pulled and pulled until the pole was wrenched from the socket. The instrument was fast beyond recovery, and with keen regret we left it in the hardened lava.

We turned to retreat from the crater, and before we had reached the upper brim we looked back, and saw the awful lake emptying itself at two points, one of which appeared to be in the very place where we had stood half an hour before. The whole southern portion of the crater was a sea of liquid fire, covering, as I estimated, about two square miles, with a probable depth of three feet.

I have heard great avalanches of rocks fall from the outer walls of the crater some eight hundred feet into the dread abyss below with thundering force. At the distance of two miles I have heard the sighing and sighing of the lava waves, and upon the surface of that awful lake I have seen, as it were, gory forms leaping up with shrieks, as if struggling to escape their doom, and again plunging and disappearing beneath the burning billows. To stand upon the margin of this lake of fire and brimstone, to listen to its infernal sounds, the rolling, surging, tossing, dashing, and spouting of its furious waves; to witness its restless throbbings, its gyrations, its fierce ebullitions, its writhing, and its fearful throes as if in anguish, and to feel the hot flashes of its sulphurous breath, is to give one sensations which no human language can express.—From *Life in Hawaii*, by the Rev. Titus Coan.

SUDDEN WHITE HAIR.

Sorrow, not time, frosted the bright tresses of Mary Stuart and Marie-Antoinette; and theirs were not the only queenly heads that have been prematurely whitened by care and anxiety. While Hanover was waging an unequal contest with Prussia, a lady in attendance upon the consort of the brave blind king wrote thus of her royal mistress: "In the last two months her hair has grown quite gray, I may say white. Four months since one could hardly discern a gray hair; now I can hardly see a dark one." A similar change has often taken place in the course of a single night. One of the witnesses in the Tichborne case deposed that the night after hearing of his father's death, he dreamed he saw him killed before his eyes, and found, on awaking, that his hair had turned quite white. An old man with snow-white hair said to Dr. Moreau: "My hair was as white as you see it now, long before I had grown old. Grief and despair at the loss of a tenderly-loved wife whitened my locks in a single night when I was not thirty years of age. Judge, then of the force of my sufferings." His white hairs brought no such recompense with them as happened in the instance of the gay gallant who had the hardihood to hold a love-tryst in the palace grounds of the King of Spain. Betrayed by the barking of an unsympathetic hound, the telling of the old old story was interrupted by the appearance of the king's guard. The scared damsel was allowed to depart unchallenged; but her lover was held captive to answer his offence. Love-making under the shadow of the royal palace was a capital crime; and so overwhelmed with the horror at the idea of losing his head for following the promptings of his heart was the rash wooer, that before the sun rose his hair had turned quite gray. This being told King Ferdinand, he pardoned the offender, thinking he was sufficiently punished.

When the Emperor Leopold was about to make his grand entry into Vienna, the old sexton of St. Joseph's Cathedral was much troubled in his mind. Upon such occasions it had been his custom to take his stand on the pinnacle of the tower, and wave a flag as the imperial pageant passed by; but he felt that age had so weakened his nerve that he dared